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Ten Cents

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"Nur-Mahall Light of The Palace"

THE SHORTSTORY PUBLISHING COMPANY 41-47 Pearl Street, Boston, Massachusetts
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The Black Cat

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Nur-Mahall — Light of the Palace.*

BY MICHAEL WHITE.

READ now a true story. If fiction can produce a more romantic one, then the saying that truth is the stranger of the two will be undone.

At the period when Western Europe was becoming interested in the then new land of America, there was living in a town of Khorasan, Persia, a young man called Ghyas Beg. For him the future looked fairly promising. Through the influence of a friend he had obtained a remunerative government position, and on the strength of it married the girl of his choice. But he had barely thus established himself, when his influential friend died. Then Ghyas Beg lost his position, and, with a young wife to support, his future in Khorasan did not look so hopeful.

Failing to obtain another situation, he cast his eyes in the direction of India. Under the progressive rule of Akbar the Great, that sword and plague swept land was entering on a period of prosperity. It was doubtless after much discussion over the dangers of the journey and the whole risk of the venture that the young couple finally decided to emigrate to India. So Ghyas Beg turned what possessions he had into portable property and joined a caravan about to set forth by way of Kandahar.

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That was over three hundred years ago, but the same scene may be witnessed to-day in Khorasan. There is the endless turmoil and confusion in loading the kicking, grunting camels. Shouts, blows, and curses resound upon the walls of the caravanserai. At the moment of departure no one is ready. But somehow a semblance of order at last prevails. The long string of hump-backed beasts slowly swings out on to the far stretching plain. A deep toned gong-like bell, suspended to the neck of the leading camel, beats out a rhythmical warning of the caravan's approach.

In this way Ghyas Beg and his young wife set forth for India. Doubtless their feelings were very similar to those of any pair of emigrants who in our day turn their faces hopefully toward the United States. But even to-day the risk of a journey between Khorasan and India is great. The country intervening is for the most part an arid waste of barren hills and sun-baked desert. Only where a stream wanders down from the mountains, are strips of vegetation and human occupancy permanent. It is not unlike some regions of our West. Bands of robbers also rove over it, just as the Apaches not so long ago made Arizona a territory to enter with caution.

In Ghyas Beg's case, the greater part of the four hundred miles between Khorasan and Kandahar was traversed in safety, then fell disaster. The caravan was successfully attacked by robbers, and looted to the last bale of merchandise. It may be presumed the plunder satisfied the robbers, otherwise the travelers' lives would probably have been sacrificed. Be that as it may, Ghyas Beg and his wife found themselves utterly ruined in the strange land of Afghanistan. As it was impossible to turn back homeward, they were compelled to struggle on.

With the help of a robber, who took pity on their forlorn condition, they managed to reach Kandahar. And there, in some miserable mud hovel, shortly after took place an event which was destined to cast a great light over the whole of Asia. To Ghyas Beg and his wife was born a girl baby. It must surely have been in a spirit of contradiction that they named the child Murinisa or Seal of Women, for never were the fortunes of a young married couple at a lower ebb.

Ghyas Beg could discover no means of employment in Kandahar,

and without friends how they managed to exist must subsequently have seemed a miracle. At last they reached a point of such destitution that the almost certain failure of an effort to reach India on foot impressed them as the better choice of two evils.

So Ghyas Beg and his wife again set forth, the husband this time carrying a begging bowl for alms, and the wife bearing the infant Seal of Women. Little could any passer-by have guessed that the wretched couple, to whom perhaps he tossed a coin in charity, were the parents of a child whose name would adorn her period with a lustre second to that of no other woman in history. But soon there were no wayfarers to notice their condition, if the begging bowl had been full no food could be purchased, and they faced starvation. They had reached a land of utter desolation on the further side of the Indian frontier. Their situation was desperate. Without food the mother was unable to nourish her child. Death for all three seemed close at hand.

The Castaway

It must have been with a faltering tongue that Ghyas Beg proposed the last chance for life. He suggested placing Murinisa by the roadside in the hope some traveler would rescue her, and with what strength remained struggling on in the effort to reach a village. One need not dilate upon the anguish this plan caused the unfortunate mother, but it seems to have prevailed. Murinisa was left to become the not unlikely prey of a savage beast, and the two went on to meet what they believed to be their death.

But soon after there came that way an Afghan governor proceeding to report to the Emperor Akbar at Fathpur-Sikri. You can picture the Afghan governor, hawk-like of feature, white bearded, steel clad, and riding easily with a jingle of arms on his Arabian charger. His body-guard paced behind at a respectful distance.

With his eyes bent thoughtfully downward, the Afghan governor suddenly detected an unusual object. He reined in his horse and gave voice to his astonishment on beholding an infant that appeared none the worse for her strange predicament. He was equally impressed with the child's remarkable beauty and her lusty appeal for his succor. The grim man of battle quickly dismounted. Taking the infant in his arms he endeavored to soothe her fears. A touching picture must have been that of the Afghan governor

holding the child as tenderly as possible to his breast of chain mail, while his body-guard of blood-stained souls gathered round in sympathetic wonder.

To the governor, the problem of how the child came to be by that barren roadside quickly gave place to the one of how he was to provide for her. Somewhere in that region he must find a woman to nourish the baby, otherwise his rescue would prove of no avail. Refusing to relinquish the child to one of his officers, he remounted and rode hastily forward. It is probable that a cavalcade bent on such a mission never before or since swept along that road to India.

Great, therefore, must have been the governor's relief when, at a turn of the way, he saw a man and woman apparently asleep. But as a fact Ghyas Beg and his wife had reached the limit of endurance and sank down to await the end of their ill-fortune. It was unnecessary for them to explain their plight to the governor. Riding up, he took them to be a pair of tramps who had foolishly ventured into a region where their kind are not often encountered. At the moment he did not suspect them of being the parents of the child he held, and whom he had decided to adopt for his own.

If the mother's joy may be conceded, it was tempered with fear of the governor's anger at abandoning her child. So she held back her secret. In the meantime the governor had proposed to Ghyas Beg that if his wife would act as nurse for the child, he would provide for them on to Fathpur. Needless to say how gladly the terms were accepted. So the curious drama proceeded, Ghyas Beg's wife trying to simulate the part of nurse toward her own child, while the governor took upon himself the cares of an adopted parent.

But his keen watchfulness soon detected a tenderness on the part of Ghyas Beg's wife not in keeping with her rôle of nurse. Reflecting over the circumstance of meeting the pair so soon after discovering the child, he observed them more closely. Then he abruptly charged Ghyas Beg's wife with being the child's mother. In tears she admitted the crime of abandoning her child, pleaded her destitution, and begged the governor not to separate them again. The governor reasoning that the case was one for a higher authority, decided to bring it before Akbar. He intended to claim the child on the ground of abandonment.

So finally, Ghyas Beg with his wife and child were summoned into the presence of the Emperor Akbar, sitting there in a hall of his wonderful desert-palace of Fathpur-Sikri, one of the truly great men of all time. For a long space he looked at them, and one can imagine their conflicting hopes and fears with every change in his expression. Presently Akbar spoke, and when his lips moved millions of people listened with both ears.

"I can make and unmake kingdoms by the raising of my hand, but I have no power to punish a crime by separating a mother from her child. Let Ghyas Beg be one of the gatekeepers of my palace, so that this poor woman may not again be tempted to abandon that which is her own life. You have now my permission to depart."

* * * * * * *

Thirteen years had passed since Akbar bestowed upon Ghyas Beg the position of a palace gatekeeper. In that space he had risen high in Akbar's favor. He was now a minister of the government, his wife a woman of fashion, and his daughter, Murinisa, a rare beauty, with a talent for composing Persian verse and a sprightly gaiety which found an outlet in tricks played upon the ladies of Akbar's harem.

It would appear that Murinisa's mother had already concerned herself with the subject of a brilliant match for her daughter, but Ghyas Beg shook his head. Murinisa was his pet, his idol, and he was loath to part with her. Therefore he ended such discussions by saying it would be time enough to talk about the matter next year or the one after. But as this leads up to a dramatic scene between Murinisa and Akbar, a word concerning that monarch may not be inappropriate.

Akbar was one of those strange, conflicting personalities which defy complete analysis. If one makes allowance for the divergent mental process between Oriental and Occidental, in certain characteristic aspects Akbar resembles Frederick the Great. In all matters connected with the administration of his vast empire, whether in peace or war, he was a man of iron will and decisive action. If it was his purpose to reach a given spot, relays of horses bore him thither with incredible swiftness, far outstripping his exhausted attendants. A solitary horseman riding like the

wind toward the gate of any city gave remiss governors shivers of conscience, lest it be Akbar coming for an account. For his period he was an enlightened and progressive sovereign, without shadow of compeer the greatest who ever sat on an Indian throne. His code of land laws is still considered the best possible system for India, and in recognition of his justice as an administrator the British government maintains his tomb suitably covered with a costly drapery.

But on the other side of his nature he was a philosophic dreamer, one who chose to pass his leisure hours listening to the debates of mollahs, Brahmins, fire-worshippers, Buddhists, and Jesuit fathers. He delighted in the society of poets, painters, and all men of genuine talent. Though nominally a Mohammedan, he was a searcher for the Universal Truth, with a wide tolerance for all forms of religious belief.

Every evening when the sun sank a red disk upon the desert horizon, bathing the walls of his marvelously beautiful palace at Fathpur-Sikri in a glow of crimson splendor, a roll of drums and a flourish of trumpets proclaimed the hour of Akbar's worship. Into the great hall moved a procession of twelve of the fairest maids and twelve of the handsomest youths of the empire, bearing torches, and symbolical of the hours of the solar day. Surrounded by his sidars and emirs, Akbar arose at their approach. As each pair passed by the emperor, they cast their torches on the pavement. The sun had sunk beneath the horizon. So, too, must Akbar's glory fade. So must pass into the darkness of oblivion the best and the worst of all human effort. That was Akbar's interpretation of the ceremony.

Tradition has it that Murinisa more than once took part in these processions, though it is hardly likely Akbar noticed her particularly. On such occasions he was present only as a dreamer. But it is more than likely that Selim, the Prince Imperial, was observant of her singular beauty. One record has it that Selim and Murinisa played together as children, another that he came upon her by chance in a garden, when she wittily but firmly rejected his advances. But wherever he first met her, it is certain he fell deeply in love with the girl who had once been a cast-away by the Afghan roadside.

Finding that he could make no progress in Murinisa's affection, he thought the best plan was to lay his suit before her mother. But that diplomatic woman, with ever a backward glance on the horror of that Afghan journey, was not of the mind to risk Akbar's displeasure, even to elevate her daughter to the Moghul throne. She reasoned that if Akbar heard of it, his wrath would be stirred at the very suggestion of such a misalliance. This she pointed out to Selim. The Prince Imperial stoutly protested he would marry Murinisa and risk the consequences. In vain Murinisa's mother pleaded. Selim was obdurate, and talked recklessly about rebellion if his father interfered between him and Murinisa.

Thoroughly frightened, Murinisa's mother decided to lay the whole affair before Akbar. Again Akbar looked on the woman who had stood before him thirteen years before in such different circumstances. But when he had heard the whole story, he merely ordered that Murinisa be sent to him, that he wished to speak with her alone.

Of that meeting between Akbar and Murinisa there is only rumor. But one can imagine the scene with some approach to fidelity. Akbar loved to watch the sun rise from some lofty balcony in his palace. The hour of nature mystery suited his mood as a dreamer. It was then he gave private audiences, apart from affairs of state. The advancing day bore its full working measure. So it may be assumed Murinisa was brought to him when the East was tinged with a blaze of gold, purple and crimson glory, and a cool breath of air temporarily subdued the desert heat.

What did Akbar think of the maid standing before him in the expanding loveliness of her great beauty, and with the rays of the rising sun streaming full upon her? What did the maid think of Akbar, he who had done and knew so much, who had come to regard life as of little worth, and across whose path the shadow of a tomb stretched prematurely? What said he to her? In what manner did she respond? It is not often a man such as Akbar talks seriously with a maid of Murinisa's years, but he had reason to be anxious for the empire he had created when his son occupied his place. He wished to know the kind of girl Selim had set his heart upon.

The Maid

Rumor has it she frankly told Akbar she did not wish to marry his son, but that she was destined to sit upon his throne. Akbar was startled out of his dreams. Here was daring far beyond a young girl's measure of discretion. In what way was he to construe her meaning? Probably she was unable to do so for him, except by the word of an astrologer. Rumor again has it that for a brief moment Akbar was so enchanted by her poise and beauty, he was tempted to forestall her imagined destiny, but reason quickly vanquished the thought. It is said he talked with her for a long time, and told her many things by which she was guided in after years.

Presently he asked her whom she wished to marry. Murinisa named a young noble of the count, one of Prince Selim's companions. Akbar shook his head. He possessed information that the young noble's family were among those who supported Prince Selim in his designs for an insurrection. It was the usual way in India when a son considered his father had reigned too long. Already Akbar's hand was stretched above that family. It might fall at any moment. One can believe that it was far from his wish that the beautiful girl before him should be found among the victims. Rather he would secure the intelligence he perceived developing in her mind for the progressive end toward which he had striven. So his decision was to bind her to his side, for Akbar fully appreciated the influence of women.

In response to a question, she again firmly asserted she did not love Prince Selim and therefore did not wish to marry him. Then Akbar, the Bayard of Indian chivalry, without conceiving offence, asked her for her friendship. It can be imagined with what girlish enthusiasm it was granted, and how subsequently the words, Friend of Akbar, would fall proudly from her lips. All gates would fly open at that sesame. It was a passport no one dare challenge. Finally Akbar told her he would think over the subject of her marriage, that he would choose a man worthy of her, one who was also to be counted among his friends.

So Murinisa was not permitted to marry the young noble she had named, but was bestowed upon a general whose fidelity to

Akbar was unquestioned. By way of a wedding present he made her husband governor of the important province of Bengal, and dispatched the pair with gifts suitable to their high position. Shortly after, Akbar sent for his son, Selim, and, in spite of the Prince Imperial's protests, married him to a princess of the royal house. As the princess was the kind of girl who told her mother everything about her husband, Akbar was kept well informed of his son's unsatisfactory proceedings.

* * * * * * *

In the year 1556 Akbar died, and his son, Selim, ascended the throne with the title of Jehangir, or Lord of the World. In the meantime Murinisa had passed several years happily with her husband in the Government of Bengal and had forgotten the Prince Imperial, probably also that girlhood dream of the Moghul throne. But the image of Murinisa had never been absent from the mind of the now Emperor Jehangir. Except in his lifelong devotion to the Persian maid there was nothing praiseworthy in his character, and he visited his disappointed hope of Murinisa with cruelty on his wife. It is said that she died from the effects of such ill treatment. Be that as it may, Jehangir vowed there was only one woman in the world for whom he cared, and that unless Murinisa shared his throne there would be no Empress of the Moghuls. Recollecting his Oriental nature, combined with his unscrupulous character, what follows need not be so surprising.

Almost Jehangir's first act as emperor was to send his brother to Bengal on a mission to induce Murinisa to divorce her husband and marry him, the emperor. With indignation Murinisa told Jehangir's brother that she loved her husband and did not care as much as a cowrie shell for the emperor. She treated the suggestion with scorn. When this report reached Jehangir, he replied, charging his brother to insult Murinisa's husband, and kill him in the resulting duel. It was not a pleasant task for Jehangir's brother. Moreover it was dangerous, because Murinisa's husband happened to be an expert swordsman. But Jehangir's brother carried out the order, and parted with his head in consequence.

An eye witness of the duel remarks casually that it was hardly to be dignified by the title of a combat. Murinisa's husband rode down upon his adversary, and with a single stroke avenged the insult. The head was returned to the emperor so that he might see for himself what had happened, according to custom. Jehangir was not gratified by this unexpected rebuff to his plans, and he now descended to worse treachery. He sent a band of cut-throats to lure Murinisa's husband to a lonely spot and murder him. Unfortunately for Murinisa's husband, the ruffians were successful, though four out of six of the band fatally tasted the steel of the victim. Then Jehangir ordered that Murinisa be brought to him at Agra.

If he imagined that she would be so dazzled by his splendor as to overlook his crime or forget her grief, he was waiting for a keen disillusionment. When she was brought into his presence, she confronted him as fearlessly as she had done his father. When he offered her his hand, she called him a "bloody murderer" and vowed that under the circumstances she would sooner consent to marry a dog in the street than the Emperor of the Moghuls. Assuredly a great courage had developed in that Persian cast-away, for she had hurled at Jehangir the worst possible insult.

"Very well," remarked Jehangir calmly. "I will wait until you change your mind. You have my permission to depart at your own pleasure." Considering that he could take what appealed to his fancy, at least this was a display of decent after-feeling.

For three years she repulsed his repeated offers, and contemptuously returned his gifts. During that period she persisted in wearing widow's garments, and hesitated to express a wish lest Jehangir hearing of it would order it instantly gratified. Even to removing the Himalayas for her, as he once expressed it. But with this single purpose absorbing Jehangir's mind, the affairs of the empire sank into frightful disorder. The court became a nest of intrigue, rebellions broke out, and the murmurs of the people under tyrannical governors rose with threatening force.

The eyes of all those who wished to continue the enlightened rule of Akbar were turned upon Murinisa. It was pointed out to her that as long as she refused to gratify Jehangir with her

hand, things would go from bad to worse, that she alone could influence him to take up the work of government seriously, that she must sacrifice her outraged feelings for the benefit of the whole empire. To this plea her own family added that upon her action in accepting Jehangir depended the fortune of father, mother, brothers, and sisters. Throughout the pages of history one cannot recall the similar instance of a woman, certainly not a Mohammedan, confronted with such a harassing and responsible problem. Finally she consented, as she said, not by any choice of her own, but that a weak spirit might not be charged against her.

Unbounded was the joy of Jehangir when he heard the news. "Now," he cried, "everything will go well, since Murinisa shall rule the empire. She has more wisdom than myself, my ministers and generals, all put together. By Allah! Let those take care of their heads who attempt to play tricks with her judgments."

Universal rejoicing took place throughout the empire when the proclamation went forth announcing that Murinisa had become the wife of Jehangir with the title of Nur-Mahall, or Light of the Palace. Men no longer feared to speak even in a whisper. It was as if a nightmare of advancing horror was lifted from the land. Upon Nur-Mahall, Jehangir promptly showered honors never before dreamed of by a Mohammedan woman. He placed the government of the empire in her hands, ordered that her seal should appear on the coinage jointly with his own, and that the edicts of the empire should go forth in her name.

The Empress

It is indeed gratifying to reflect how admirably she rose to her vast responsibility. For Nur-Mahall it was no life of voluptuous ease, amid scenes which, to our day, are synonymous for unparalleled splendor — palaces of marble decorated with jewels, the host of proud emirs in all the gorgeous panoply of that age waiting at her command, even the state elephants trained to kneel in her presence. For such display Nur-Mahall seemed to care little. She was of a different caliber to heroines of the type of Cleopatra, and without the vanity of her great contemporary, Elizabeth of England, occupies a similar niche in the Hall of Fame. Her

actions were governed by a clear, far-seeing, well balanced mind.

She was not as other queens, write the native historians, passing her days in pleasure and enjoyment, but rose before the first watch to gather to her council the wisest men of the empire. At all times she ate sparingly, and though her garments were of such fine texture, that they could be drawn through a finger ring, she discarded jewels as burdensome trifles. Her body was as vigorous as her mind. Hunting was her chief pastime, and on one occasion she slew a panther unaided that had sprung upon her by surprise. Observing in the silken robes of the young nobles the first sign of that degeneracy which eventually caused the downfall of the Moghul Empire, she ordered that chain mail was the proper court dress, and sent the young dandies on dangerous and toilsome expeditions to sharpen their effeminate spirit. At the height of her power she wished to be reminded of her humble origin, so that pride might not obscure her judgment.

Such is the character sketch made of her by those of her period.

Perhaps curiously, while her husband, the Emperor Jehangir, sank into a state of senile debauchery, he remained absolutely faithful to this one woman of his desire. But for her his throne would hardly have been worth a day's purchase. Thus by her lofty and forceful personality the enlightened rule of Akbar was restored, preparing the way for the zenith of Moghul power and prosperity under Jehangir's successor, Shah Jehan.

The progressive spirit of Nur-Mahall was displayed in the efforts she made to better the condition of women. By her order schools for girls were first established in India, and a large fund was set aside from her private fortune to dower orphans of her own sex. At least five hundred girls are said to have been so benefited, while thousands of unfortunate women were assisted by her sympathetic generosity.

If it would be tedious to give in detail the events of her reign of seventeen years, numerous instances proved her splendid courage. Almost of necessity rebellions broke out, owing to the ever present intrigues of an Indian court. More than once she was compelled to subdue such by leading her army in person. Mounted on an elephant, and armed with bow and arrows, one catches glimpses of her in Hindu narratives, plunging into the thick of

the conflict, to emerge wounded and blood-stained, but victorious. On one occasion when a rebellious son succeeded in capturing both herself and her husband, she tricked the guards into permitting her to escape. That was a sad mistake on the part of the guards. She presently returned at the head of a hastily raised force; cut down all who opposed her, rescued her husband, and capturing the rebellious son, sent him to a penitential diet of rice and water in a cool but extremely dark prison.

In recognition of the love and worth in which Jehangir held her, he caused her title to be changed from Nur-Mahall, Light of the Palace, to Nur-Jehan Begam, The Queen The Light of the World. He also built for her a dream-palace in Kashmir, which forms the setting of Moore's famous poem, Lalla Rookh, with the lovely Nur-Mahall for the heroine.

It was to her the ambassador of King James I was referred, when the first treaty between England and India was being negotiated, and he speaks in high praise of her ability. Beyond this it is no exaggeration to say her influence extended over a vast territory, from the shores of the Arctic Ocean to Ceylon, from the borders of China to the Caspian, and in the main that influence was exerted for the benefit of humanity.

Finally, when her husband died in 1625, she relinquished the stress of government to pass the few remaining years of her life in retirement. More than any other woman she was honored and respected by all the people, so say the native historians. A portrait of her in the possession of the Indian Government depicts a beautiful oval face, with wide, thoughtful eyes, and leaves no doubt about the firmness in her mouth and chin.

That the memory of her still lingers with her people may be discovered by any one who chances upon a *bhart,* or wandering Hindu minstrel. It is fairly certain he will soon begin to sing of the beauty, wisdom, and courage of that great woman who was once a castaway by the Afghan roadside.

The Lower Trail.*

BY I. M. CROSS.

WO trails lead from the Herslip ranch to the post-office, one over the mountain top, the other along the mountain side, sometimes dipping to the creek, sometimes climbing to join the upper trail.

Wilma Herslip usually took the shorter, lower trail, but this day she wanted to think, with only the blue sky above her and the mountain peaks stretching upon every side.

"A Symphony in Khaki," Lawrence Falk had called her, and, in her khaki habit and cap, she and Jeff, the buckskin broncho she rode, seemed a part of the dull, ochre-colored mountains, a page of nature's great symphony.

Her feet swung clear of the long, cow-boy stirrup, — Hiram had taught her to ride that way, for safety. Jeff was sure-footed as only a bronco can be: Hiram had spotted him as being the best of a band of wild horses, had lassoed, "busted," trained him, until he was the best cow-pony in Montana. Wilma paid no attention to him, and he picked his own way over sharp ledges, down crevices so steep that he slid on his four feet with knee and gambrel joints stiff as steel, again climbed an almost perpendicular wall, digging his tough hoofs into the seams of rock. Her khaki cap was pushed back from hair only a shade darker, and her face with its coat of mountain tan was not many shades lighter, but brilliant with rich red cheeks and lips and big brown eyes with sparks of hazel glowing under long lashes.

She reached out a slim brown hand and touched the lasso wound about the saddle horn — Hiram had braided it of rawhide and taught her to use it. He had sent to Mexico for the saddle under her, none good enough could be bought nearer.

Faithful Hiram! What had he not done for her? She had

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never had a thought for any other man until Lawrence Falk came, not three months before. She remembered so well the first time she saw him, the day he rode up to her father's ranch house. It was dinner time and the cow-boys were in the yard. She heard their shouts and yells of derision:

"Hey! The Grasshopper has come! Where d'ye larn that style, Tenderfoot?"

In his elegant riding coat and breeches, his handsome face expressing only amusement at their gibes, Wilma had thought him like a prince, even though he did ride with the short stirrup that crooked his knees and made the cow-boys nick-name him "The Grasshopper."

He bore their gibes so good-naturedly that they soon left off, and it was not long until, whether roping a steer or busting a bronco, he was the equal of any of them — except Hiram.

In one thing he could surpass even Hiram, — making love. The first moment he saw Wilma his eyes spoke admiration, his voice was full of caresses. He was tender, passionate, eager, wooing her by a thousand arts and blandishments, where Hiram had only his simple blunt honesty. Yet a feeling of mistrust would come over Wilma when she was away from the influence of his winning, rollicking presence.

"Is he all right? Is he honest?" She asked herself, many times, but of Hiram she always thought with perfect trust.

Jeff pricked up his ears, turned his head towards the edge of the cliff and gave a low whinny.

"What is it, Jeff? What do you hear?" Wilma asked, and stopped him to listen. She heard angry voices, curses, below her, and dropped from the saddle, threw herself upon the rock and leaned far out over the edge of the cliff. Upon the lower trail, where it was so narrow that only the surest footed horse might venture, Hiram and Lawrence Falk had met. Hiram's voice rang out angrily:

"If you were decent I'd never say a word, but you're a bigamist; you escaped — "

Oaths leaped from Lawrence's handsome lips. Wilma looked at his face distorted with rage, and shuddered. "If I hadn't been fool enough to leave my revolver behind me you'd never

repeat that. You're jealous because Wilma loves me. I'm going to marry her just to spite you, not because I care anything for her. Now back up and let me pass."

"Back up yourself. You'll have to back only a rod and the trail's wide enough for both of us; I'd have to back more'n thirty rods." He took his heavy riding quirt, held it suggestively and looked at Lawrence with a concentrated anger that Wilma had never seen before upon his face.

Lawrence's face became like a devil's. He backed his horse along the trail — a mere rim on the long declivity dropping to the creek. The horse's hoofs crowded each other and the nervous thoroughbred trembled. Wilma watched, too frightened to make a sound, hardly knowing that she was praying for Hiram. Suddenly Lawrence drove the spurs into his horse and gave the rein a yank to force the horse between Hiram and the mountain. Quick as the action was Hiram met him with his bronco crowded again the mountain wall. They met with a force that sent thoroughbred and bronco upon their hind legs. For a second they wavered there, then toppled and went crashing down the cliff.

Wilma screamed and shut her eyes. For a moment she lost consciousness, then, even while mountains and sky were dizzying about her she gathered herself up, one thought insisting: she must go to Hiram. She would find him dead, at the foot of the mountain, she knew, but she must find him. She jumped upon Jeff's back, and forced him down steep ledges and over jutting rocks, where neither man nor horse had ever stepped before.

When she reached the lower trail she slipped from Jeff's back and threw herself flat upon the narrow shelf to look for some trace of Hiram below. At the foot of the mountain, she saw Lawrence's thoroughbred and Hiram's bronco huddled together in a mangled heap. At one side of them was Lawrence Falk; his face had escaped mutilation and he lay white and handsome in death. She looked around for Hiram, then, not thirty feet below her, she saw him. He lay motionless, one shoulder caught between the ledge and the trunk of a stunted juniper that had, somehow, got a foothold in a crevice of rock.

"Hiram! Hiram!" she called. Again and again: —

"Hiram! Hiram!" Not a sound or motion answered her. A little gopher came out of the rocks and ran so fearlessly across Hiram's still feet that she shuddered.

She looked skyward and at the mountain's precipitous walls for help. It would take hours to get help, and if he were only stunned he might recover consciousness and move his shoulder from the juniper, then he, too, would pitch down the mountain. She looked at Jeff and, without an instant's hesitation, took the long lasso, made one end fast to the saddle horn and swung the other end over the cliff.

"Jeff," she breathed, patting him, "I must get Hiram, and you must help me." She took a small flask of brandy from the saddle pocket, — Hiram had put it there: one of his provisions for her in case of sudden sickness or accident. She put it in the pocket of her khaki blouse, then, with a sharp command to Jeff, seized the lasso and swung herself over the cliff. The moment Jeff felt the lasso taut he stiffened himself with feet braced while Wilma went down, hand over hand, until she reached Hiram. The ledge whereon he lay was so narrow that he was held there only by the juniper, and Wilma could not find a foothold, so she quickly made the lasso fast about her body, then, partly supported by the lasso, half dangling by it, she leaned over Hiram and called to him. He did not answer but his hands were warm. She took the flask of brandy, forced its neck between his teeth, and let some of the liquor trickle down his throat. She rubbed his hands and face, calling to him by endearing names she never before had spoken, all the time praying that Jeff might stand the strain she was making upon him. At last she felt, rather than heard, a faint sigh and the slightest quiver of his body.

"Hiram! Lie still!" she cried, in an agony of fear that he might wriggle himself from the juniper. She took the long end of the lasso, trailing below her, and fastened it around him, under his arms. By the time it was secure he opened his eyes.

"Wilma," he murmured, tried to smile, and groaned feebly.

"Hiram! don't move; where are you hurt?" Wilma asked.

It took him a moment to recover consciousness sufficiently to answer:

"My arm," — he tried to move it, "I think it's broken —" his voice failed.

"Hiram! Hiram!" Wilma cried, "try to keep awake, and think; how am I going to get you out of here?"

"If I could use both hands, I could go up the lasso —"

"You can't, but I can; do you think you can lie here until I can get help from the ranch?" She took hold of the juniper to steady herself. The added weight was too much for the little tree; she heard the roots crack, and let go of it, but it was so weakened that it might pull out any moment, then they would be hanging by the lasso, and Jeff would not be able to hold them both after the long strain that she had put upon him.

"Hiram, I'm going up to the trail and make Jeff pull you up; it's the only way to save you." Before she had finished speaking she was half way up, clawing rapidly at the lasso, in desperate attempt to reach Jeff and rescue Hiram.

She pulled herself, panting, over the ledge, and went to Jeff's head.

"Jeff, the hardest is to come, can you do it? O, Jeff, don't fail now; if you do, we will all go down together." She half-sobbed the words into Jeff's ear, then called bravely:

"All ready, Hiram, keep yourself off the rocks."

"All right, Wilma," he answered. The last word was drowned by a crash; the juniper had lost its last roothold and gone down the mountain with loose rocks. Hiram started with it, but brought up with a jerk upon the lasso; Jeff was not prepared for it and his feet slipped.

"Jeff! Jeff! Get up! Get up! Jeff!" Wilma cried, and clung to the bridle, pulling with all her strength. Jeff scrambled, struggled wildly, sometimes he seemed about to slide over the cliff, then, one mighty plunge and he had gained a firm foothold and started up the trail. He was blown and trembling when Hiram called faintly:

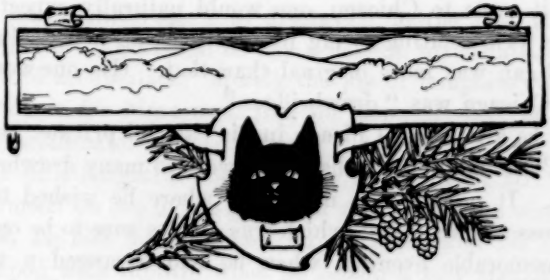
"Whoa, Jeff." Jeff obeyed, turning his head with a whinny of recognition of the voice.

Wilma ran back, knelt by Hiram, took his head upon her lap and burst out crying:

"Hiram, my Hiram!" she sobbed, kissing him again and

again. "Look," she said, pointing downwards. A flock of buzzards were hovering, silent and evil, over the still bodies at the foot of the mountain. While Wilma and Hiram were looking they slowly settled to their feast.

Wilma shuddered and held Hiram closer. "Thank God you are here, safe, Hiram."



The Benevolent Drawbridge.*

BY ALFRED J. OLSEN, JR.

R. SPIKE MULLIGAN was an extensive traveler and an exceedingly keen observer. He had a way of sizing up each of the large cities he had visited and of laying his grimy finger at once upon its distinguishing characteristic or idiosyncrasy. Then he would epitomize his verdict into a single terse, pithy word.

Mention New York to him, and he would smile and say "hoss-cars." His word for Buffalo was "flags." (He referred not to the kind which float proudly in the breeze, but to those which are made of stone.) Concerning San Francisco, his dictum was "chinks"; while of Pittsburg he would simply ejaculate, "Holy-smoke!"

When it came to Chicago, one would naturally expect him to find some term relating to big feet, or packing houses, but no — Mr. Mulligan was more original than that. His one-word judgment of Chicago was "drawbridges."

Before he arrived in Chicago in his palatial private "side-door Pullman," he had no idea that there were so many drawbridges in existence. It seemed that no matter where he wished to go, he had to cross a drawbridge, which was always sure to be open.

One memorable evening, when he had arranged a very important business deal with a pal, agreeing to take the 8.05 train for Blue Island, he had been held up from 7.55 until 8.06 on the North side of the Chicago River, while a long freight boat crawled through the draw.

Mr. Mulligan's agitation was pathetic. In the most picturesque of his exceptionally fine stock of oaths, he cursed the shippers who insist upon running their barges up the river during the busiest parts of the day; he showered a perfect torrent of vituperative expletives upon the heads of the city fathers who had failed to provide suspension bridges high enough for steamers to pass

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under; and he had consigned to the most uncomfortable regions of purgatory the engineers who had built the tunnels, which are always out of commission.

It was scarcely a week later, however, that this same drawbridge became a vital factor in Mr. Mulligan's concerns, and this time he rose up and called it blessed. If you ask him to-day what he thinks of drawbridges, he will answer, "Great invention."

The purpose of this yarn is to explain Mr. Mulligan's sudden change of heart.

I should have said at the start that Mr. Mulligan was a collector of women's hand-bags. During the dozen or more years of his professional career, he had probably collected about a thousand of these interesting articles. He was an expert in all sorts of feminine fripperies, from the sumptuous bags of genuine alligator skin to the tawdry ones of embroidered cotton; from the diminutive silver vanity bags to the sole leather satchels.

One would think that such an extensive collection as this would require considerable space to display it to the best advantage; but the fact is that, though he had a passion for acquiring, he had no desire to accumulate. Merely the joy of temporary possession was sufficient for him; and, like the domestic bee, he gathered only to disseminate.

It was on a delightful evening early in July that Mr. Mulligan found himself on one of the principal streets of "the windy city." As usual, he had his eye open for business, and his collector's heart leaped with rapture when he beheld a new specimen, quite different from any hand-bag he had ever placed in his collection.

Its form and construction were common enough — it was of the familiar mesh bag type — that the unusual thing about it was that it was made of gold. At least it looked like gold in the glare of the arc lamps in front of a near-by moving-picture show.

The owner of this coveted object, a stout, apoplectic woman of uncertain age, was standing on a street corner, with the golden bag held gingerly between her thumb and forefinger. In the vernacular of the streets, "it looked good to him."

In one sweeping and comprehensive glance, Mr. Mulligan took in the situation; and in an equally sweeping and comprehensive grasp, he took in the bag. Then, with alacrity born of long ex-

perience, he dashed down a narrow side street, whither his practised eye had told him he would be most likely to find the seclusion for which he had an intense craving at that particular moment.

When the outraged victim felt herself suddenly deprived of her treasure, she gave vent to a piercing shriek, which made every man within a radius of half a mile stop abruptly, and run in her direction. That is, every man with the exception of Mr. Mulligan. He had just recalled an important engagement, which made it imperative that he hasten in the opposite direction; and this accounts for his ungallant failure to respond to the lady's scream.

He had not taken twenty steps, when his trained ear caught the cry of "Stop thief!" and a hasty glance over one shoulder revealed the fact that a considerable crowd, led by the corpulent, but none the less active, woman, was at his heels. Fortunately, the road before him was clear, and he trusted to his long training as a sprinter to get him out of danger.

He was still half a block away from the cross street toward which he was running, when, to his great dismay, the burly figures of two policemen appeared at the further end of the street. Evidently, he was trapped.

There were no lights in any of the stores or offices along the way, and he knew without trying that all the doors were locked. The left side of the street was an unbroken line of high buildings, but on the right side he thought he detected a narrow opening, which suggested an alley-way. He reached the corner half a minute ahead of the officers, and, without stopping to reconnoiter, swung into the lane.

Imagine his horror when he found he was in a blind alley, which had no other opening than the one by which he had entered. However, Mr. Mulligan's motto was, "Never say die," and he continued to run full tilt at the opposing wall. Right in his path was a small door, and a bright electric light just above it suggested that it might be unlocked. Had he stopped to inspect the sign over the door, he might have read the legend :

"STAGE ENTRANCE.
KEEP OUT!"

But Mr. Mulligan was in no mood for literary pursuits. There

was but one thing for him to do, and that was to fling open the door and dart through it. Near the door sat a man, his chair tipped back at a comfortable angle, and as Mr. Mulligan made his precipitous entrance, he serenely fell over backwards. He shouted something, which the fugitive pretended not to hear, and the next instant a deluge of people swept over him.

Our hero continued to move in about the same direction as before. He scrambled over a pile of canvas-covered frames, ran lightly up a short flight of steps, wended his way through a papier-mâché forest, and suddenly burst out into the full glare of the calcium light.

For a brief moment he hesitated, puzzled and perplexed at this unforeseen development. On his right, in the semi-darkness, he could distinguish tier upon tier of upturned faces. Far down at the back of the hall, a great, dazzling, white eye glared at him menacingly. On his left was a large white screen surrounded by a gilded frame of painted canvas, on which he could make out the flickering shadows of a "moving picture." All this Mr. Mulligan took in at a single glance. Then he heard sounds at his rear, which told him it was his turn to move.

The picture drama which was being flashed upon the screen at this psychological moment was one of the familiar "chase scenes," which are always certain to delight the enthusiasts who patronize shows of this sort. I am sure you know what I mean. If you don't, you ought to hie you away at once to the nearest ten-cent vaudeville house. You have a great treat before you.

There are various sorts of "chase pictures." It may be that a man has advertised for a wife, and is besieged by such a flood of applicants that he decides to make a break for it, and of course about a score of the would-be brides pursue him over hill and dell, over fences and under bridges, through fire and water. Or perhaps a gipsy has kidnapped a child, and is chased by the frantic parents and by the miscellaneous assortment of individuals they recruit along the way.

The audience of the "Screenic Temple" were being treated to just such an exhibition as this when Spike Mulligan, at the head of his remarkable assemblage of quaint and curious people, made his unceremonious debut on the stage.

First came the intrepid Spike himself, with his glittering trophy still clutched in his right hand. Close behind him was the furious victim, who, despite her embonpoint, still managed to keep at the head of the pursuit. Her hat, with its flowing ostrich plume, was hanging over one ear, held by a single pin. She was shedding hairpins and puffs in great profusion, and her face was the rubicund shade of a freshly baked brick.

The crowd evidently thought that was an innovation, arranged especially for their amusement, for they clapped lustily as she made her grand spurt across the stage and disappeared in the wings on the opposite side.

Next came the two policemen, brandishing their night sticks, as they stamped ponderously across the stage. Behind them surged a heterogeneous jam of people. A bevy of small boys with papers under their arms, a few fashionably dressed women with their stylish gowns deftly gathered up in both hands, a man in the uniform of the Salvation Army, with a cornet in his hand, a small wizened old woman carrying a large basket.

All these people jostled each other, and tumbled, and strained, and pushed to get through the small opening and dash across the stage. The applause was ear-rending. It was unmistakably the hit of the evening.

But Mr. Mulligan did not wait for an encore. Modesty was a virtue which he had long cultivated. He darted through the wings, doubled back behind the scenes, and made a bee-line in the direction of the red light which illuminated the conspicuous inscription, "EXIT." The tail end of the procession was still striving to force its way on to the stage when he reappeared at the outer door.

An irate manager was soundly berating the bewildered door-keeper, who was trying to explain how he happened to let so many people in free, when the dauntless Spike dashed between them. With the sweeping motion of a racing swimmer, he thrust them aside, and burst into the fresh air of the alley.

He hoped to reach the thoroughfare before the first of his pursuers arrived at the opening, but for the third time he met with disappointment. The bang of the door slamming behind him was closely followed by a crash, as it was thrown open again, and he

knew without looking back that his pursuers were once more hot on his trail.

Down the alley he sprinted, wheeled sharply around the corner to the left, and soon found himself on State Street, from whence he had started his exciting Marathon. With the instinct of a homing animal, he ran northward in the direction of the freight yards, which he knew were not far distant.

Most of the people he passed were going in the same direction as he, and as they saw him dash past, and heard the hoarse cry of the chase, they only stood still and gazed in blank amazement, until they were met by the frantic rush of the man-hunters, who ran them down, and stumbled pell mell over their prostrate bodies.

Mr. Mulligan concluded that the middle of the road was the safest place for him, and it was a merry chase he led, dodging between trucks and street cars, and stumbling over the cobbles. A few hundred yards ahead of him he made out the ugly outlines of the State Street drawbridge. He was not in a frame of mind to pay any attention to aesthetic scruples, however, and to him the bridge looked very beautiful, for he knew that just beyond it were the freight yards, where he would be on familiar ground, and where he could easily elude his would-be captors.

But just then an appalling sound burst upon the evening air. It was the loud, discordant jangling of the alarm bell to warn pedestrians and drivers that the draw was about to open. Mr. Mulligan heard, and understood, but the ominous warning did not make him swerve from his northerly course. His motto was still, "Never say die."

Like romantic Don Quixote, tilting with the windmill, Spike Mulligan ran at the opening drawbridge. With the elusiveness of a greased porker, he slipped through the fingers of the officer who was guarding the bridge, dodged under the gate, and leapt upon the rising draw.

If you are familiar with Chicago, you will recall that this particular bridge is of the type known as the "double sheaf bascule bridge." It is made in two sections, which part at the center and open upward, like a cellar door.

It had risen to an angle of about thirty degrees when Mr. Mulligan darted under the gate, but his momentum carried him

up the incline, until his feet were on the uppermost edge. Here he tottered for a fraction of a second, then he hurled himself across the yawning abyss.

His fingers just caught the opposite edge, as he swung downward, and he clung on with all the prehensile power he could muster. Then he threw one leg up over the edge, and a moment later he was rolling head over heels down the precipitous northern slope of the bridge.

He lost no time in picking himself up, and in tripping down a steep flight of stairs to the welcoming region of the freight yard. Here he soon found refuge in a secluded fruit car, the door of which had conveniently been left open. With the treasured souvenir pressed to his breast, he cast himself, panting and perspiring, on a pile of straw in one corner of the car.

It was fully an hour before he dared creep to the open door and peer out. Save for the jangling of the locomotive bells, and the hissing of the air brakes, everything was peaceful and quiet, and Spike had no fear of being molested, as he sat down in the light of a near-by electric lamp to inspect his recently acquired possession.

Gentle reader, I shall not burden you with a description of the contents of the golden hand-bag. If you are a woman, you know just about what was in it; and if you are a man, it is really none of your business. The only articles of intrinsic value which Mr. Mulligan found in it were a Canadian dime and three Lincoln pennies. Besides this, there was a small mirror, a square of chamois, slightly soiled and covered with pinkish powder, a nail file, — but I forgot, — I wasn't going to tell.

I think, too, that I had better draw a veil over the scene which ensued when Mr. Mulligan's "uncle" informed him that the gaudy bauble was made of solid brass, and offered the munificent sum of two bits for it. It is really too horrible to chronicle. Let us pass hurriedly to the final tableau of the tragedy, in which Spike Mulligan is discovered with two fingers of his right hand extended toward the murky dome of the Chicago sky. Need I tell you that he is gently murmuring, "Never again"?

And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight.*

BY MARY MORRISON RAYNAL.

AGNES HALLAM'S eyes could not tear themselves away from the new minister's face, a vivid, sensitive face, ploughed by deep lines of thought and pain. Isolated as she had been from other thinkers, she was for the first time facing her intellectual master, and her hungering spirit made obeisance before him. Mystical by nature, she soared upward in unison with him. At the close of the service, still under his spell, she was stayed by a young cousin, one of the few to penetrate her solitude.

"Isn't he wonderful, Cousin Agnes?" Evie questioned, eagerly, "wait and meet him."

Miss Hallam wavered. The slurring of curious eyes in her direction had in earliest childhood warped the impetuosity of her nature. As she matured she had yielded more and more to the desire to shut herself from sight, a crook in her body having wrought a corresponding crook in her soul. Even as she wavered the minister was upon her, his pitying eyes searching out the wistful beauty of her face.

When she climbed the hill to her red brick house she was hugging to her heart his promise to come to her soon. Through the long, sweet hours until he came she waited in a maze of dreams, and when he came it was better than the dreaming. Here at last was one who responded to every need of her nature, the mate for whom she had been waiting through her empty years. In his presence, forgetting self, she talked as she had never been inspired to talk before. The same music, the same books, held for them a common charm, and his whimsical observations so vivified her dormant sense of humor that the old library echoed with unknown bursts of girlish laughter. After he was

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gone Miss Hallam paused before one of her dim mirrors, wondering happily how the sad maturity she was there familiar with could have been transformed into such flushed young eagerness.

The minister's calls were infrequent, but each was precious enough to fill the days of waiting. Meanwhile she could treasure up so much to tell him, mentally rehearsing each item, until the actual and imaginary conversations became intermingled in a golden haze. At night, when her own light was out, she would stand long by her open window gazing at the other light glowing through his window. He studied far too late, she felt with love's pang of apprehension, after a while he would be made to rest. And then she would fall to wondering shyly if, in the fulfilment of her dreaming, he would move up to her great house on the hill, or she down to the little gray manse. The latter was the sweeter thought, already she was thirsting for love's self-abnegation. True he had made as yet small sign, but in her heart there was no doubt. Deep was calling unto deep, the response must come, all the dearer for its slowness.

During those April days the very air breathed of love. Never before had Miss Hallam's garden broken into such a splendor of bloom. Never had so many wee chickens and fluffy balls of ducklings scurried across her path. Rushing out in new abandon she stood with head thrown back, eyes half closed, drinking in the intoxicating beauty of the day. As she stood thus, syringa petals showering her, a light buggy flashed past her on the street, eternally printing its picture upon her brain. The vision showed her Evie, the sun gleaming on her bright head, her ardent young face lifted to her companion. And he, the minister, gazing so absorbedly down into her eyes that he did not even see Miss Hallam, though his head was turned in her direction.

Very slowly she went back into her sombre library. The strength had gone out of her limbs, she felt as if the actual physical pain of the shock would take her life. The panorama of her friendship with the minister spread itself before her. That which she had taken for budding love had been but the kindliness of a sympathetic nature. The burning glance, the lingering handclasp had been devoid of meaning. He had pitied her.

If it had been any one save Evie, was her moan, but she had loved her so. Like an older sister she had watched over the girl, and her own bank account had furnished every luxury of Evie's life. Such a return! Its unconsciousness did not lessen its cruelty.

Through that sultry morning, during which her dreams fell dead about her, Miss Hallam abandoned herself to the bitterness of this final thwartment of her loving nature. Then, very wearily, she took up life again, living through the days by sheer nerve strength, giving no sign of suffering.

A few weeks later Evie came slipping in at twilight, and, somehow, they worked up to the dreaded announcement. But when Evie began to beg her to play the wedding march Miss Hallam's powers of endurance snapped. Her refusal was so curt that the young girl fairly fled from her presence.

"Cousin Agnes is so queer sometimes," she sighed while telling the minister about it.

"But think how she shrinks from publicity, with that poor crooked body," he gently reminded her, and Evie's tender heart melted with remorse.

On the bridal evening Miss Hallam shut herself into her own room. She had tried to brace herself for the ordeal of the service, but so fast was her control ebbing that she dared not offer her face to public scrutiny. Falling down across her great four posted bed, desolation closed in upon her. Her suffocating heartbeats set themselves to the measure of Lohengrin. The scene in the church flamed in her mind's eye. She saw the minister's radiant tenderness, saw Evie's childlike pride merging into awe as she stood before the altar. She followed them through the congratulations, and the rice showering, and when the late train sped them away on their bridal journey it had never, it seemed to the poor soul, gone forth in such blatant triumph.

The primeval instinct for slaughter possessed her, she could have slain this woman who had robbed her; this man, who, in his stupid blindness, had failed to see that which lay within his grasp. As the night wore on she fancied that she was pursued by a monster, a leopard-like thing with a weird superhuman quality. Grasping a knife, as the thing was upon her, she

stabbed it through the heart. Meanwhile a great black bird was pecking, pecking on her door, which was, she knew, the spirit of that which she had slain.

Miss Hallam soon afterward went away on one of her long, solitary journeys, and when she returned the minister was reveling in domesticity. Fortunately she was spared frequent intercourse with the manse. Evie, immersed in her new duties, had little time for her cousin. On their rare meetings Miss Hallam was so sparkling, that the little wife, outstripped in the exchange of wit, would fall silent, lost in sweet pride in the rejoinders of her clever husband.

The autumn wore itself away, and in mid-winter a pang of anxiety gripped the village. Evie was ill, desperately ill. During the weeks through which the young wife fought for her life Agnes inquired daily at her door, listened, seemingly sympathetic, while being told of the prolongment of the anguish, but the crook in her soul had grown during this siege of misery, steeling it against all pity. She who had been robbed of her joy in living gloated now over the avengement of her sleepless nights and gray dawns. To the very last there was no relenting.

On the night that Evie lay dying, Miss Hallam watched in her great house on the hill, every nerve as taut as though she had been actually in the death chamber, her reason swaying back and forth as it had done on the night of Evie's marriage. In the dawn she listened, outwardly calm, to the sacred details of the death. Inwardly she was shaking with a murderous exaltation.

All day the sleet fell with mournful monotony, clicking against the windows insistently. A cedar in the front yard succumbed to its burden of ice, in its fall blocking the entrance to the porch, against which it rapped clammy fingers, as if a legion of ghosts were demanding admittance. Agnes, watching dry-eyed, saw the neighbors come and go, come and go all day from the melancholy little house. Finally she saw the minister himself go out on some last sad errand, stooping like an old man beneath the weight of his sorrow.

A morbid desire possessed her to see the dead, to view the downfall of that insolent young pride. Swiftly she went down the avenue, where the skeleton trees were merging into the dusk, her

heels crunching through the ice with a harsh rasping sound, the sleet stinging no color into her gray cheeks.

Cautiously she opened the house door. In the sitting-room two caretakers were crouching over the fire, the very flame of which seemed frozen, and, wan and blue, lapped the wood ineffectually. Passing silently through the vault-like hall, she ascended the stairs. In the room at the head of the stairs the cold took on a new force, creeping, nerve straining. A hyacinth vase, on a stand near the bed, had been splintered by the freezing; amid the fragments of glass the hyacinths lay, their whiteness turned to transparency, their pale stems frozen in a block of ice. The shadows were dense, but not dense enough to hide the rigid whiteness of the form on the bed. Agnes swayed on the threshold, will power well nigh inadequate to stay a fleeing from the mysterious terror which invests those chilled by death.

Forcing herself forward she stood over the bed. By degrees death's miracle was wrought upon her. Bitterness and hatred shriveled away before the piercing sweetness of that young face. A mighty pity seized her, bringing with it the first rush of womanly tenderness in all of those grievous months. A feeling of personal loss overwhelmed her, her early love for the girl awoke and cried aloud. In her wretchedness she tried to evoke some comfort from the serenity, after long pain, which was frozen on the still face. This very serenity, though, was an unknown quality in a face which had been so piquant, superseding all familiarity. And the hands, how could such eager hands lie so motionless? She noticed, numbly, how long and thin they had grown. The ring, the wedding ring, was almost slipping off, but when she tried to push it into place her own fingers faltered away, shocked by the feel of the icy flesh.

The click of sleet was the only sound in the gray universe. Suddenly, with a sickening creak, the upper half of a tree split from its trunk, crashed on the roof, and fell with a thud to the ground. To the woman, draining her cup of trembling, it seemed that the world was being rent asunder. As the tree swept past the window the wild wavering of the shadows caused the expression of the dead face to flicker, and a movement to pass, apparently, over the figure. Her knees slipping from under her,

Agnes fell down by the bed, breathing mute, futile prayers to the dead.

"Oh, forgive, forgive!

"Precious little girl, come back!"

Convulsive sobs rent her thin frame. Tears came to her relief. The wondrous peace of the dead form was communicating itself to her. The dead, seemingly, had understood. Her own forgiveness had evoked a corresponding forgiveness.

In her paroxysm of grief she had not heard approaching footsteps. The minister stood gazing down upon her, too absorbed in his own grief to wonder at the intensity of hers. His first emotion was one of gratitude, such passionate grieving was the dearest tribute to his dead. But his was not the nature to look upon grief without attempted comfort.

"Agnes," his hand rested lightly on the crooked shoulders, "Agnes, we must not rebel. Heaven is for such as she."

At his touch a new heaven and a new earth opened for the poor, crooked soul, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away.

The Lighted Lamp.*

BY ANNA McCLURE SHOLL.

HEN you're done cussin' and swearin' and summonin' all the powers of hell to come and take the camp, will you be so good as to tell me what you go over yonder for every night?"

"It's none of your business."

"Never said it was. You go into the dark — you come back lookin' plagued."

"Shut up."

"I won't."

"Well, then, I was cryin', cryin' because I was blamed tired, cryin' like a kid because I'd been fifteen hours on my legs — "

The speaker glowered into the fire. The nature of his confession accorded ill with his appearance. A creature dark with the sun and tormented by the winds, his powerful muscles knotted and strained by agonies of labor, his black hair hanging over his somber eyes, his suit of khaki as weather-stained as his complexion — he seemed the incarnation of man's struggle with a howling, hostile wilderness, a dry, burning, cactus-covered, tarantula-infested eternity of desert.

His fellow engineer, a handsome boy from the East, still unexhausted by the country, refused to accept the explanation of fatigue from the embodied dynamo opposite to him. Leiter had brought something to the camp, Sheldon conjectured, that jumped out of the dark and clutched his throat in those leisure moments towards midnight when the two fellow-workers, having dined on canned salmon and stale bread, sat shivering together by their fire, too tired to sleep, to quarrel, to argue, to read, to do anything but wonder what inadvertence of deity had created that country. Each was plagued by it to the limit of his endurance, but young Sheldon had no interior inferno to deal with into the bargain. Leiter, he suspected, had.

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"Crying — that does you good! I bellow night after night when I've turned in. I bellow for my Mummie — for broiled steak — one night I even bellowed for the subway, I was so lonesome. My idea of heaven that night was just to be packed in a subway train in the five-thirty crush and smell that subway air! But you — you're cryin' for something different."

Leiter drew in his breath with a shuddering sigh.

And then Sheldon risked being shot.

"Tell me about her."

He expected to hear the click of Leiter's rifle, but the dark image by the fire sat motionless. Then he spoke as if every word tore him.

"By God, I will! I've got to. I've been alone with it for a year now."

"Tell it, Leiter, just tell it," Sheldon urged.

"Was you ever married?" Leiter asked in a queer, humble voice, utterly unlike that in which he thundered at his men.

"Never! I've wanted to be," Sheldon answered hopefully, that the note of sympathy might not be lost. "There's a girl in Brooklyn — "

Leiter went on as if he had not heard.

"I was livin' in the East for a spell when I met her — a quiet little woman — and one of those steady men they breed there was courtin' her. She ought to have married him; he hadn't any wild blood, nor rovin' blood. He couldn't have rove beyond the corner grocery, but he probably would have made her a good husband. Anyways, he was after her when I come along. I sailed in an' took her. She was the first woman I'd ever wanted to marry and I kind o' frightened her into it, bullied her, held her up! That's where I made my mistake. You can't lasso your wife, like she was cattle.

"She was always sort o' timid with me. She didn't say much and I used to think she took it out in cookin'. She was an awful good cook. But somehow, she didn't seem happy, and then that other man used to drop in, just to show her, I guess, what she'd missed.

"I gave her all the rope she wanted, though I was burnin' up with jealousy some days, and restless, too, wantin' to go back

West. Seemed like I hadn't elbow room in that little town.

"I'm gettin' to the point. — I came home one night late. There was a supper keepin' hot for me in the kitchen, the table set for one, the lamp lighted on it, and under the lamp a note. It said:

"'I'm not the wife for you, Jim. Don't look for me — '

"I don't know what I did for a while. Next thing I knew I was stridin' down the road to the depot, talking to myself. I talked to myself all the way West, I guess, for I nearly got locked up. What they did to the house, I don't know to this day. I left it just as it was, with the supper in the oven and the lamp lighted. I tore up her note — that was all — to keep their tongues from waggin'."

Sheldon gazed into the fire. He pictured the little wife, young and slim and fresh-cheeked, shrinking from her tornado of a husband. Leiter was enough to frighten any woman, yet Sheldon knew that he could be as gentle as a girl.

"I've got a theory, Leiter."

"Well?"

"She never went away with that man."

"What makes you think so?"

"A woman married to you might run away with a man like you but not with — "

"Reuben Joy," Leiter supplied.

"Now that I know his name, I'm quite certain she didn't run away with him. Did you look for her that night?"

"Look for her! What do you mean?"

"Why, go through the house, of course, go upstairs and see whether her hat was there and the hatpins on the cushion, and the little bag she took marketing."

Leiter started as if he'd been struck.

"How did you know about that bag?"

"I didn't. But every woman has one."

"I believe you've been married," Leiter said, suspiciously.

"No, but there's a girl in Brooklyn — "

Leiter interrupted. "Look for her! Why didn't I look for her? — but she said, 'Don't look for me.'"

"That's what she wrote," Sheldon said, "but only God knows

what she meant. Now, see here, you old government mule of a tormented idiot, you get leave from headquarters to-morrow and start East, and I'll wager you a hundred dollars to a box of sardines that you'll find her where you left her and longing for you to come in and track her best carpet with your boots, like you used to do!"

Leiter heaved a long, reminiscent sigh. His lean, brown hand grasped Sheldon's for a moment.

"If she's there," he said, contritely, "I'll leave my boots at the door. I used to make her a lot o' work forgettin' to wipe my boots."

* * * * * * *

Four days later, Leiter rode away from the desolate camp towards civilization and his hopes that were about equally balanced with his fears. Sheldon watched him until horse and rider were a mere speck on the horizon and then turned back, strangely lonely and homesick, to the society of the Chinese cook and the half-breed laborers.

A fortnight passed, and one day the half-breed who acted as postmaster to the camp came riding in with a budget of mail from the East. Sheldon sifted the letters hurriedly for one from Leiter, and found it. It bore the postmark of a little town in Massachusetts. He tore it open and read:

"I'm home! Got here about dark. The lamp was lighted, and she had a hot supper like she was expectin' me — said she'd been expectin' me for a year. She'd gotten down in the mouth, before it all happened — thought I didn't care for her — thought she wasn't makin' me the right kind of a wife.

"She never got far that night. She came runnin' home, cryin' home, after she got started a little ways. She said that though she still thought I didn't love her she knew once she got on the run that she loved me. She was upstairs gettin' off her things when I came in and found her note — gettin' off her things and cryin'. You was right.

"I'm bringin' her West — she's never been West — says she wants to see the camp. You can fire the Chinese heathen; and, Kid, when we hit the camp, Mary and I, I'll get you leave of absence to look up that girl in Brooklyn."

The Yellow Mask.*

BY CHARLES NEWTON HOOD.

[This story appeared in THE BLACK CAT ten years ago and is reprinted by request.]

HE cleverness of Lemuel C. Loomis was ingenuity raised to a very high power, and if he had any local rival it was certainly his ingenious helpmeet, Lucinda L. Loomis, born Laurence. When they were married the groom had reached his fifty-second year and the bride had bidden farewell to the frivolous thirties.

As nothing will develop a latent talent for labor-saving devices more thoroughly or impart a more intimate knowledge of one's own peculiar traits than living alone, the couple entered upon their new experience unusually well equipped in both these respects, and their house-hunting was rendered both easier and more difficult. They examined a great number of houses in their little village, and made the real estate agents a great deal of trouble, but they knew so well what would and what would not answer their purposes, that they were able to give prompt and decided decisions after one inspection.

Finally the choice narrowed down to two houses, at about the same price. Each was three squares from the church which they attended and four from the post-office, and the interior arrangements of both were, in the main, satisfactory. Each, however, had one great defect. The house on Locust Street had no hall, the front door opening directly into the sitting-room, while the Elm Street dwelling, with an ample hallway, had neither a bath-room nor any space that could be converted into one.

"Which shall it be, Lucinda?"

"What do *you* think, Lemuel?"

"I would much rather that you would say, my dear."

"And I should prefer that you should decide, darling."

"Well, then, without either of us deciding it," said Mr. Loomis,

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diplomatically, "let us each write our opinion on a piece of paper, and exchange them."

"All right," agreed Mrs. Loomis.

Mr. Loomis unfolded his wife's opinion with much curiosity and read:

"I have always said I would never live in a house which did not have a front hall."

Mrs. Loomis read on her husband's slip:

"It has always seemed to me that if I were building a house, I'd build a first-class bathroom, and with what money I had left build the best house I could around it."

Both laughed heartily and rose with one accord to give the houses another inspection.

"It would be pretty hard to build a hall on that Locust Street house," said Mr. Loomis.

"But by building an addition on the west side of the Elm Street house," replied Mrs. Loomis, "we could have a nice bathroom, without much cost, and build it when we can best afford to."

Mr. Loomis complimented his wife on this happy solution of the difficulty, and before night had secured a deed of the Elm Street property. Then he figured a little and said:

"I don't think we can afford to build the addition this year, and I dislike to perform my ablutions in a wash-tub or — "

"Oh, I have thought that all out," replied Mrs. Loomis, smiling, "and I have such a nice idea. We will buy a handsome tub — just such as we will want for our new bathroom — and set it up back of the kitchen range. There needn't be any plumbing, except the exhaust pipe, for it will be so close to the range that one can dip the hot water from that, and by turning the top of the rain-water pump in the sink around, cold water can be pumped directly into the tub. We can have a nice broad shelf on hinges to let down over the tub, and that will make a splendid kitchen table, and nobody need ever know that there is a tub there.

While this ingenious arrangement would have been very inconvenient for some families, it was perfectly suitable for the Loomis *ménage,* free from even a kitchenmaid. Down behind the range proved an exceedingly cosy, warm spot in which to take a leisurely

bath. The new tub was a beauty, and when the broad shelf, practically amounting to a folding table, was dropped down over it, supported by two swinging legs at the right height for a work bench, Mrs. Loomis said it was the most convenient for washing dishes on that she had ever seen, and it was not at all uncommon for Mr. Loomis to assist her in that employment, that their Sunday forenoons and all their evenings might be longer.

Mr. Loomis was a member of the village Board of Trustees, which held its sessions on Saturday evenings, and it was his custom, on returning from these meetings, to enjoy a thorough, leisurely bath before retiring. Then he had the kitchen all to himself and could take his time.

One particular Saturday night the village council had held such a protracted sitting that it was actually Sunday morning when Mr. Loomis stole into the kitchen, swung up the portable table, and as silently and rapidly as possible filled the tub. A flood of moonlight came in through the windows, and he did not trouble to light the gas, but was soon soaking placidly in the warm and comfortable bath.

A heated discussion over the purchase of a road roller had wearied Mr. Loomis considerably, and while reviewing the arguments as he lay in the tub, he fell asleep. This he himself denies, asserting that he heard the first touch of the burglar's hands on the window fastening. This latter statement there is no means of controverting, but it is positively known that Mr. Loomis did not enter the kitchen later than a quarter past twelve o'clock, that the intruder's presence was not observed much before two, and that it had never before taken Mr. Loomis an hour and three-quarters to bathe.

However, when he did hear the fumbling at the fastening, his first impulse was to leap from the tub and repulse the invader. His second thought was merely to flee. What he did, in the excitement of the moment, was to reach upward, grasp the swinging shelf and pull it down just as he heard the kitchen window gently raised.

Either the water had cooled a great many degrees since he entered it, or else Mr. Loomis was very much frightened (he leaned toward the former theory), or the two reasons combined

to cause such a shiver that it was with difficulty that he prevented an alarming swashing in the bath. Peering cautiously over the rim of the tub, he shivered more violently than before. A man was crawling through the window. The moon had now nearly gone down, but the solid black silhouette indicated a rogue of monstrous size.

The suspense was horrible.

Before the intruder dropped quietly to the floor he shot a tiny searching ray of light into every corner, and the head of Mr. Loomis slid out of sight as a startled turtle slips off a log. In an agony of apprehension the householder heard the burglar tiptoe across to the pantry and back. Waiting as long as he could restrain his curiosity and alarm, he again peered cautiously between the table-shelf and the tub-rim.

The burglar was sitting in the middle of the room, with his back toward Mr. Loomis. By the faint light of the tiny lantern he could not see what the man was doing, and wriggled a little higher up. As he moved his feet there was a slight disturbance in the water, and Mr. Loomis realized only too well what it meant. Pending the permanent location of the bath-tub, he had, with his accustomed ingenuity, utilized a large cork as an exhaust plug, and this, loosened by his foot, had bobbed to the surface. The water was running out rapidly. When it was nearly all out the exhaust would make a hideous, gurgling wail, startling the burglar, Mr. Loomis would be discovered, and in his helplessness probably murdered.

He fumbled wildly for the cork, but it eluded every clutch, and he dared not make a noise. He tried to check the flow of the water by inserting his toes in the orifice, but this only slightly delayed the end. Nothing could stop the water — his moments were numbered.

Discovery being inevitable, it were better to be prepared for defence, he thought, before the alarm from the exhaust pipe came. As quietly as possible he pushed the shelf upward on its well-oiled hinges. Fortunately, it made no noise. He rose slowly on his benumbed limbs and stood upright in the tub. The water was getting lower and lower and he had but a moment to decide upon a plan of action.

He could now see the burglar, who was engaged in devouring a lemon pie, a sort which Mrs. Loomis made especially well, and of which Mr. Loomis was particularly fond, and which had been intended for their Sunday dinner. It was as yellow as gold, and topped with a beautiful, thick, frothy meringue. If the blood of Mr. Loomis had not been so chilled, it would have boiled at the sight of the rough-looking robber wrecking this masterpiece of pastry, and feeding with a knife at that.

The time for action had come. Mr. Loomis felt around for a weapon, but could find none. He was in depair. The last wave of the retiring water floated the big bath sponge against his ankles. He reached down and grasped it.

As he straightened up with it poised in his hand, he was dismayed to hear a light step on the back stairs — Mrs. Loomis was descending to see why he had not come to bed. It was a fearful crisis. At that very moment the bath-tub exhaust emitted a ghastly, gurgling groan, followed by a sucking, swirling shriek.

The very worst had come, and Mr. Loomis, steadied by a realization of the critical situation, raised the saturated sponge with careful aim, and let it fly. With a soggy swash it struck the burglar squarely in the back of the neck, forcing the villainous face violently into the center of the lemon pie, to the very bottom of the dish.

When the burglar's countenance was withdrawn it wore a mask of yellow fringed with frothy white, from which two beady eyes protruded with a horrible stare. They fell upon the open doorway of the back stairs, where a plump matron in snowy white just then sat forcibly down upon the bottom step, still clinging to a smoking lamp, whose shattered chimney fell upon the floor.

Then, as they turned in the direction from which the cold, paralyzing missile had come, and beheld the stark form of Mr. Loomis, their owner gave utterance to a cry very like that just emitted by the bath-tub, and disappeared through the open window. The clock struck two.

The Portrait.*

BY KATE DICKINSON SWEETSER.

GERALD MANLEY'S artistic manner was to pose a subject in as nearly as possible the same place and light as that in which the finished portrait was to hang. He made a careful study of Helene Hamilton and her home background before beginning work on her, and the keynote of his conception of her dominant characteristics was struck when he designed the portrait for the dining-room, and posed her in an attitude of ease and grace, leaning one plump elbow on the corner of the white Italian mantel, just below where she was later to hang in perpetual ease and grace. In actual fact, his conception was not complete, for Helene was many-sided, and to doom her for all time to the dining-room mantel was to curtail her ability, and doom all but one of her talents to oblivion.

But Gerald Manley was an autocrat where his work was concerned. The portrait was hung where he decreed, and Helene, goddess of hearth and home, looked down on John Hamilton as he ate his cereal, buttered his toast, sipped his demi-tasse — while Helene, the actual, flashed tantalizing glances across the new mahogany, in competition with that other canvas self.

The original was a delightful combination of sweetness and light, of charm and dignity — the portrait was a compelling likeness of features and spirit. If Helene was anything, she was bewitching, unique. The portrait was Helene — merry eyes, mocking lips, graceful curves of profile and features, and more than that — it was Helene, the ideal; home-maker, mother. The close portrayal of body and spirit was a delight to John Hamilton, — and also to Helene's mother, the doting parent of an only child, who could have gazed eternally on reproductions of her darling, — as well as to friends, who marvelled at the

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magic of Manley's art, which could so interpret a personality like Helene's.

When Helene the actual was gone from human sight, gone beyond recall of human love or longing, Helene, goddess of hearth and home, still hung there in eternal youth and grace; mocking, bewitching, human, elusive and *his* forever. John Hamilton lingered long over his meals, that he might feast on the portrait, and as he looked, the canvas-self brought comfort, strength and peace to his fevered soul, — fortified him to go out into the world again and work, and meet the pitying eyes of those who knew.

For over a year, he and the portrait were close comrades, but time loosens all bonds, even those of love, when the human touch has gone. In the second year of his solitude his horizon widened, and soon after village rumor had begun to play battledore and shuttlecock with his name, he announced his engagement to Anna Redmond, Helene's cousin and most intimate friend, who had been a frequent and welcome guest in the home during Helene's lifetime.

To Helene's mother, who had cared for John Hamilton's comfort and managed his household since her child's death, the engagement was a bitter confirmation of the inconstancy of all male created beings, and she and her belongings at once became conspicuous by their absence. She was abroad at the time of the wedding, and village censure of her was sharp, for the widower had chosen wisely, and waited decorously. There could be but one Helene, but Anna's time had come, and the difference between the cousins was so marked that the two wives could not but mark two distinctly different epochs in John Hamilton's life. The second could not encroach on the first. Anna was brown-haired, soft-voiced, placid, sunny and even in temperament. She had but one human ideal, cherished secretly from childhood, — John; one love, — John; and John was hers now. She felt no jealousy of Helene in retrospect, her hour had come.

But to be matrimonial successor to Helene was no easy matter and required ready wit, special courage, and confidence in one's own ability to charm. Anna did not face the situation, she

simply accepted it, and became a fixed star in a sky across which a meteor once had flashed.

Slight evidences of the change of mistresses were evident in the home. Helene's room had been hung with yellow; Anna's was in pink. The Louise Seize boudoir became a den where John and his friends could smoke and discuss business and politics. Anna's seat at the table faced the portrait; Helene's had not.

John was very affectionate, very solicitous to do all, be all that would minister to Anna's comfort and pleasure. He was entirely satisfied with the restful atmosphere of his home, and he loved Anna with a quiet love which she repaid in overflowing measure.

But there was the portrait to be reckoned with, and the reckoning was a heavy one. At every meal, Helene stood in her accustomed place, watching the bride with merry, mocking eyes, listening to her every word, scorning her when she did not fling appropriate jests or repartee across the table as she, Helene, had done. Anna, never original in thought or action, found herself watching Helene for suggestion, for approval, for inspiration. She began to listen for her own silences, to hesitate to voice her own puerile witticisms, even to stammer, under the mockery of that pictured rival, becoming finally so conscious of her own limitations of speech and looks that she was shorn of individuality through desire to imitate. Helene had been a red rose, — she, Anna, was a white one. Red was the color John liked best. Oh, the misery of it!

A futile anger possessed her soul that the portrait should so dominate her domain, dwarf her sources, cripple her energies, destroy her happiness. She rallied to her own defense, became gay, frivolous, chattering. This was surely not serene, quiet Anna! The newly acquired manner did not appeal to John. Anna detected her defeat and was in despair under the mockery of her successful rival, who now dominated with the hideous entirety of a controlling power.

The obsession was complete. Anna grew pale, lifeless, nervous, without enthusiasm or appetite, and her husband noted the change in her with concern. They were sitting together in the twilight when he spoke of it to her.

"What is it, Dolly?" he asked, putting an arm across her shoulder. "What is the trouble? You are not yourself nowadays."

At first she was firm in her denial, then came the truth. "The portrait, John," she whispered, "the portrait —"

"The portrait — Helene's — what about it?" All the interrogation marks in the vocabulary melted into one, were expressed in John's face and voice.

"It hasn't been injured, Dolly? It hasn't fallen? Quick, tell me!"

Anna shook her head. "Oh, no," she stammered, "no, but, John, it hurts me — she was so — so different —"

There was a note of question, of appeal in the statement which, detected and satisfied, as love alone can satisfy, would have guaranteed eternal calm, but the man was deaf to it.

"I don't understand," he said. "If nothing has happened to the picture, then what can it have to do with your feelings? Of course, Helene was different, but what of that?"

There was a silence. Anna breathed fast and twisted a lock of her hair between thumb and forefinger. John's forehead was wrinkled with the riddle he was trying to read. Suddenly he surmised.

"It can't be you are *jealous* because she hangs there yet, that wouldn't be worthy of you — poor little Helene!"

The tenderness in his reminiscent tone was a stab in the right place. Anna shivered and drew herself free of his protecting arm.

"No, indeed," she said, proudly, "that would be too absurd, wouldn't it? But, John, tell me, did it never occur to you to take that portrait down before I came?"

John's astonishment was as honest as his nature was direct: "Why certainly not," he answered, "you always said you liked it specially, and you and she were always such chums. Of course not. Why do you ask, Dolly?"

But Anna had congealed, and no attempts to force her further confidence were of any avail. John, completely befogged as to the matter with Anna or the portrait, was obliged to drop the subject — and befogged he remained.

His compromise with intelligence was sternly practised. He could not understand but he could propitiate. A motor, new jewelry, the latest books, a trip — these he laid at Anna's feet in place of appreciation. She accepted them with proud and silent grace, while John Hamilton felt that his second wife was not the open book he had supposed.

The obsession of Anna was complete. She was no longer Anna, nor could she be Helene. She was not John's wife — the other was that — she was but a substitute. Rage possessed her soul and the rage that possesses such calm souls as hers is twice as awful in its intensity as that which comes to more spontaneous natures.

On a bright June day, from breakfast hour until the time to dress for John's coming, Anna did not leave the dining-room. At times she stood by the mantel, just below that merry, mocking rival; at times she stood before the mirror, looking at her living self; for the rest of the day she sat in her place at the dining-table, looking into space. Just before five o'clock she rang for the man, and bade him bring the step-ladder. Her orders astonished him, for he had not been in John Hamilton's employ for the last five years without knowing the valuation of the portrait. Anna watched him bring it down, fetched a cloth with which to flick the accumulation of dust from its frame, herself enveloped it in netting, then in papers, and followed it to the storeroom, where the hated rival was placed, face to the wall in a dark corner. Then Anna directed the hanging of a Corot, a stunning Braun photograph, over the white Italian mantel. That done, she went to her room, dressed for motoring, and drove to the train to meet her husband.

She was her most attractive self that afternoon, and John Hamilton felt pride in the choice of his wife. He looked affectionately at her and expanded into unusual confidences in the glow of his emotions. That night the dining-room was lighted as usual with candles which threw all the room into gloom — the table alone into high light — and John noticed nothing new or unusual in the familiar place.

The shock was as sharp as a pistol shot when it came, at breakfast time; when he saw what she had done to him, to Helene,

but he said no word. He saw her go white from hair to lips, when his eyes rested first on the Corot, when his lips opened with the words that never came. For an hour it seemed to him, to her, he stood ready to speak. She sat, ready to defend. Then he turned, and without a glance left her, and soon she heard him giving orders about staying in town over night. Reproach or questions would have been an immense relief — she wished she were a fish-wife, — a girl of the streets, that she might scream, might brawl, for one unrestrained hour. Would she ever see him again? But she had done what was right, oh, she was right! Now she would go out into the air and sunshine. She was afraid to stay in the house with her thoughts, and with that disgraced other wife, disinherited by her!

Upon her return, Helene's mother met her on the threshold, beside herself with anger; she and her child had been insulted; the insult must be atoned for; Anna must wipe it out by restitution of her child to the place which was hers by prior claim; Anna must apologize.

Anna was white, set, determined. She had done what was right, she said, what common decency demanded should have been done before her coming. She should never apologize — had given no insult. The warfare waged hot and merciless against her, and when John Hamilton returned from the club after forty-eight hours of deliberation as to his course in the matter, he found Helene's mother frenzied beyond the bounds of need or decency, and village gossip busy with an affair which should have been his and Anna's alone.

His decision at the club had been to convince Anna of the great wrong she had done to him and to the cousin who had loved her so dearly, in removing the portrait, to make her restore it to its place before he restored her to her place in his affections, but decision often flies through the door when impulse enters. Instead, he took Anna in his arms, in the presence of Helene's mother, and thundered out a decree of protection.

"My wife and I will decide together where it is best to hang your daughter's portrait, together, do you understand? For the sake of that daughter, who never indulged in a petty thought, or in scurrilous gossip to the detriment of a human soul, let this

matter be dropped at once, or never enter my house again! This is no concern of yours!"

Such was John Hamilton when face to face with a weaker soul in need of protection — and with a realization of his own possible mistake in judgment. Anna clung to him in white relaxed silence, then lifted an entreating face to his. He kissed her, the Corot hung where it had been placed, Helene remained in banishment and Anna's daily life went on as usual. But she grew no less nervous than formerly, the Corot brought no balm to her riotous emotions. Lurking in the shadow of the great, branching trees, hiding within the thickness of the woodland depths, elusive, mocking, wandered Helene, the very spirit of nature and of beauty. There was no relief to be found now from the agony with which Anna's soul was blistered. Out of sight was doubly in mind and oh, the misery of it!

For sixteen long months the portrait remained where Anna had herself placed it, and during every moment of those weary months Anna felt that John had not forgotten, had not forgiven, could never understand, and that she could never feel that she was wrong. But oh, to be a red rose! This was Anna's cry to a listening Providence as she lay sleepless in the long nights, sharing her pillow with that pictured rival.

Then came a time of doubts and fears, and then relief following suspense. Mother and child were doing well. Pacing the floor of his living-room, John Hamilton, as if ashamed of being thought effeminate in uttering the words, whispered to himself, "my daughter, *my daughter*!" And there glistened in his eyes the evidences that a strong man has been touched by the mystery and the bliss of fatherhood.

Anna sent for him at last, and he stood beside her, holding the tiny atom who was his child. Anna looked from the great rugged face of her husband, to the tiny one pillowed on his arm, and laid a hand on the baby's head.

"Do you see it, too," she asked. "You do, don't you?"

The question in his eyes was a mute appeal to her to interpret what he fancied, but dared not voice. She understood his appeal and she answered her own interrogation:

"Yes, *Helene!* It almost killed me at first, I thought it was

my punishment. Now I see it differently. I am glad now. Oh, John — she could never have been — jealous — she would just have loved! I have been remembering — I think she would have given you to me if she could — and I — I took you away from her. If our child has her nature too, it will be a blessing. It will prove that she was a woman and understood — and forgave — — John, you *do* see?"

It was hard for a practical man to follow the working of a woman's instinct, or to see the tiny wrinkled rose-leaf in as clear a light as she did, but John Hamilton felt rather than saw.

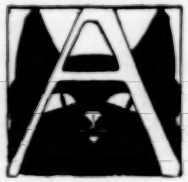
"Yes," he said, "I *do*. She loved us both, Anna, she has come in the child to reunite us."

That the nurse sent him from the room shortly was no misfortune to either husband or wife. There was nothing more to be said then, except what Anna whispered as he left her:

"Have her put back before I go downstairs, John. We were always chums, you know. Baby must learn to love her as — as — we do."

A Capillary Dilemma.*

BY AMOS R. WELLS.



FTER the high-school Freshmen in their literary societies have settled the important questions regarding the tariff, the currency, woman suffrage, and socialism, I wish they would consider and determine which is the more uncomfortable condition of life,— to be a woman and look like a man or to be a man and look like a woman. In such a debate there is no doubt which side would be espoused by Professor Colmerry.

The professor illustrates the sentiment which is ever applied to little women by the tall men that love them, namely, that the most precious articles are put up in the smallest packages. This gallant remark, however, loses its plausibility when its object is a man.

Colmerry, whose father and mother were mistakenly hailed as a good match because both were so tiny, adds to a diminutive body a feminine delicacy of complexion, a girlish cast of features, and a soft voice whose gentle modulations are fitted for no one more strenuous than a Dickens heroine. His attire also is maidenly neat, and his bearing is modest and bashful. He blushes easily, which, like these other characteristics, is not at all to his discredit, but very much to his disadvantage.

For Colmerry is a college professor, and he instructs the lower classes. If he had chosen to be a lion-tamer, his white skin and tender ways and short stature would have won for him numerous admiring and sympathetic thrills, all of which he lost when he adopted the not dissimilar occupation, the teaching of Sophomores and Freshmen.

At first the boys called him "the kid professor," which a wag inverted into "Professor Kidd," intending no slur upon the distinguished sociologist.

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Tompkins, the Freshman cartoonist, made one of his biggest hits with a drawing of poor Colmerry in skirts and a Gainsborough hat. Bill Judson, Sophomore, rhymster, promptly turned out a song:

"If a body meet Colmérry,
Coming through the Rye,
If a body kiss Colmérry,
Need Colmérry cry?"

It was not long before Professor Colmerry became the joke of the college. The literary societies cackled with veiled witticisms aimed at the unfortunate young man. On the morning after Hallowe'en the college skeleton was found (as usual) propped up on the campus, labelled (as usual) "Prexy"; but on this occasion it was accompanied by a little boy doll which it led by the hand, and the placard, "Prof. Kidd," was wholly unnecessary.

Leighton College is one of our smaller institutions, and life in a small college, whatever else may be said of it, is in much danger of sinking into trivialities. Personal characteristics are magnified, and petty spirits flourish in the limited arena. In a small college nothing is forgotten or overlooked,— the mole on a cheek, a comical error in translation, a loosely fitting coat. Professor Colmerry might have escaped notice at Harvard or Yale; at Leighton he unwillingly occupied the centre of the stage.

As might be surmised, the college butt was a failure in the matter of discipline. Every day the college commons and the supper tables of the town were enlivened by tales of pranks in his classroom. Benches full of innocent lads would sway mightily and then overturn. Lighted candles would mysteriously appear in rows across the floor. Once as he entered late a dainty valance adorned his table round about. Once a baby's high chair was substituted for his leather arm-chair. Once he found his table covered with gay nursery picture-books, of the indestructible variety. Endlessly ingenious were the variations of Freshmen and Sophomoric sarcasm, all aimed at poor Colmerry's youthful and feminine appearance.

Of course, if he had been altogether a different man, he would have laughed off these jokes in a bluff and jovial way; but if he could have done that, the jokes would never have been devised.

Being the gentle soul he was, he grew very red, and then very white; he stammered, and altogether lost his wits.

Leighton is a poor college, and cannot pick its faculty as it would like. Colmerry was a remarkably fine student of history, the author already of a notable treatise on the Incas. He was, moreover, a Johns Hopkins Ph. D., and his name looked well in the catalogue. He was grateful for his thousand annual dollars, and all these things were compensations.

Nevertheless President Cheney had had more than one prolonged interview with his trembling subordinate.

"*Make* them respect you," he boomed in his big bass.

Colmerry, sitting there pale and despondent, fervently wished he could.

"It's a serious matter," the president continued, "for a member of the faculty to be mocked by the students."

Colmerry realized that.

"Discipline, sir," said the president, "discipline must be maintained. We want to continue you, Professor, if possible; but you must find a way to control your students.

Poor Colmerry left with a sad sinking in his heart. It was easy for President Cheney to say "Maintain discipline" and "Control the students," he whose gigantic bulk and fierce eyebrows and stern bearing overawed every one in sight of him; but if President Cheney measured only five feet one and weighed only a hundred and ten it would be another matter. How long would such a Cheney be president of Leighton College?

It was at the beginning of Colmerry's second year at Leighton that the little fellow began to raise whiskers. And this was on the suggestion of Gertrude Armory.

Miss Armory was the young woman whom the professor intended to make Mrs. Colmerry some time, and the professor was the young man whom Gertrude intended to select for a husband. The compact had not gone so far as words, but some affairs do not need our clumsy parts of speech.

Gertrude was a fragile, anemone sort of girl; and you have doubtless observed in such girls the stoutest of wrought-iron decisions, and the keenest of wits to carry them through. She lived in the town where Leighton College was situated, and knew

all about the professor's trials. Like the sensible maiden she was, she wasted no sympathy on what was possibly remediable; and therefore she suggested the whiskers.

Of course she did not say why she made the suggestion; was she not a woman? She only said, "Professor, don't you think the prejudice against whiskers is flying in the face of Providence, or, rather, in the face that Providence intended men to wear? Now, you could have a superb mustache and beard. Why don't you set an example to the other men of the faculty? It is such a manly style!" There was more to the same purport, and of course before Colmerry left he had promised to stop shaving.

The days and weeks that followed were purgatorial. The frowsy humiliation of growing whiskers — what man does not shrink from it? Most of all a tidy soul like the professor.

Moreover, the attempt, which became quite clearly manifest after a week, furnished a brand-new theme for the jesters. Bottles of patent mustache-growers appeared promptly on Colmerry's table. One offering was a gaudily labelled package of Smoothine, "warranted to remove hair from ladies' faces without injury to the most delicate skin." Barbers' cards were sent him, and one day he found a mirror propped up before him on his table.

It was indeed a time of trial, and Colmerry's whiskers grew so slowly that the trial was unmercifully prolonged. For weeks his chin was clearly visible, as through a silky waterfall. White at first, the whiskers were longer in coloring than a meerschaum pipe. At their darkest they were merely a languid carrot. In texture they were like a lady's fur.

Still, Colmerry was vastly proud of them, and spent hours every week viewing with increasing satisfaction his transformed image in the mirror. Gertrude, you may be sure, applauded enthusiastically. "They are envious of you," she said, when he described the latest joke. "They are envious because they can't do as well themselves, the little monkeys!" And the professor was comforted.

The whiskers really seemed to better matters. It may be that the joke had worn itself out. It may be that Colmerry's hirsute triumphs took the point from it. At any rate, by the close of the

first term "Professor Kidd" appeared to be on the road to oblivion, and the discipline in the history classes had noticeably improved.

Then, after the holidays, came Saunders; and with Saunders came the test.

For Saunders was that pitiful thing, a deaf-mute; nay, he was that heroic thing, a deaf-mute who was rising above his horrible handicap. He had learned to talk, in the level, painstaking way of deaf-mutes. He had learned to read lips, that marvelous facility whereby the eyes, keen to note the minutest variations of the facial envelope, translate infinitesimal curves of muscle into vowels and consonants, into poetry and philosophy and science. Moreover, this Saunders was a most lovable fellow, with laughing brown eyes, and an engaging way of hooking his arm into yours while he walked. To complete his conquest of college affections, he was at once perceived to be the best all-round athlete that Leighton had seen for many a year. This was the Saunders who wanted to study history.

"But I can-not under-stand you," he explained to Colmerry on registration day. "The oth-er pro-fessors have smooth fa-ces, but I can-not see your lips and your throat. What shall I do?"

Colmerry, who was answering him on a writing tablet, replied in an unsteady hand, "I do not know. I will tell you to-morrow."

The deaf-mute's question really meant, he perceived instantly, "What will *you* do?" He took the question to his room, to think it over.

History was a required subject, and rightly so. Colmerry revered the splendid study. To go through college without history was like visiting Europe without seeing Rome. That a few hairs should bar an earnest student's access to history seemed outrageous.

And yet.

Colmerry sat down before his mirror to consider the matter. He covered his chin with one hand and laid two fingers over his upper lip. The result was a sickening reminder of Professor Kidd. He got out a year-old photograph of himself, and stared at it.

Could he go back to those days of torment? Could he, just

as he was gaining a foothold among men, in five minutes degrade himself to a ridiculed boy? He could see his white cheek gleaming through the sparse whiskers. How girlish it would be; doubly girlish after this experience of masculine bristles. And his red, full, dainty lips, with a curve like Cupid's bow, how could he bear to expose them again to the laughing light of day?

But then, there was Saunders.

The professor did not settle the matter that evening. He spent a troubled night, and woke in the morning oppressed with a sense of struggle uncompleted.

He lay a long time, debating. For a wonder, though Gertrude had flattered the whiskers into being; though they were, so to speak, even more Gertrude's whiskers than his own, he did not consider her in his debate at all. He knew instinctively what she would urge. Perhaps it was that knowledge, even more than the thought of Saunders' brown eyes, that held him to the debate.

At last, with a long sigh, he rose. Partially dressing himself, he drew hot water, made a lather, and got out his safety razor. He would not look in the glass, nor did he need to. He shut his eyes and solemnly began the sacrifice.

Ruthlessly he swept away his newly achieved manliness. Down one cheek. Down the other. Over the difficult chin. He shuddered to feel his smooth, bare face as he washed off the lather. He shuddered as the towel slipped easily over it. He completed his dressing, and even adjusted his necktie, without looking in the mirror. He clinched his teeth and hurried downstairs to his boarding-house breakfast.

He was late, very late, and he counted on eating alone, nor in this was he disappointed. There was only Norah, to look at him with laughing eyes and to explode into very audible merriment as soon as she reached the kitchen. He returned to his room, ignored the chapel bell, and tried to read his lecture notes till time for his first recitation. Then with downcast head and flushed face he went out, the cold air striking sharply on his unwonted cheeks.

Fortunately, he met Saunders near the college entrance, and bade him good morning. "Now you can understand me, can you not, Saunders?" he asked.